



# Islam and Secularism

*Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*

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## **Islam and Secularism** Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas

Written more than twenty years ago, this book is one of the most creative and original works of a Muslim thinker in the contemporary Muslim world. The author deals with fundamental problems faced by contemporary Muslims and provides real solutions, beginning with a discussion on 'The Contemporary Western Christian Background' in Chapter (I), followed by his analysis of the concepts (which he newly defines) of 'secular', 'secularization', and 'secularism' in Chapter (II). All this is then contrasted in Chapter (IV) of the book entitled 'Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality'. Based on all the preceding explanation, the author proceeds to analyze the Muslim 'dilemma' by declaring that it should be resolved primarily through what he calls the "dewesternization of knowledge" or, conversely, the "islamization of contemporary knowledge", an original concept conceived and elucidated by the author for the past three decades. Numerous original and profound ideas are contained in this book—arrived at chiefly through critical study of the Muslim tradition—such as the concepts of din, 'adl, hikmah, adab, ma'na, and ta'dib, and their significance in the development of an Islamic system of education. The rationale for the islamization of contemporary knowledge and the establishment of a truly Islamic university was in fact provided for the first time in contemporary Muslim thought by this author long before the appearance of the present book, which explains these interconnected subjects more concisely. Further, the appendix entitled, 'On Islamization: The Case of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago' is an actual explanation and application of the seminal ideas discussed in the book. This is a must read for all Muslims and those concerned with the problems and effects of secularization in our world today. This book has been translated into most of the major Islamic languages of the world— Turkish, Arabic, Urdu, Indonesian, Bosnian, and Persian.

## **Islam and Secularism Details**

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## Naim Hassan says

Buku ini dengan jelas menerangkan perbezaan antara pandangan alam dunia Barat dan Islam. Sekularisme yang berbelit-belit falsafahnya begitu mengelirukan apabila penulis memberi penerangan dalam bab yang pertama. Sekularisme yang memisahkan roh dan jasmani secara tidak langsung melahirkan fahaman materialisme, iaitu fahaman yang mementingkan kebendaan semata-mata. Rentetan itu terjadilah pembangunan yang melampau, kosong dari roh sehingga memusnahkan alam. Benarlah firman Allah bahawa kerosakan di atas muka bumi adalah disebabkan tangan manusia; mencipta fahaman yang merosakkan bukan hanya roh, bahkan jasmaninya sendiri. Sedangkan konsep Islam yang diterangkan menerusi sudut bahasa Arab memberikan penjelasan yang terang dan jelas. Penulis turut memberikan solusi untuk mengatasi masalah sekularisme dengan ide Islamisasi sistem pendidikan. Kerana konsep universiti dalam pandangan masyarakat Barat tidak dapat diterima disebabkan telah terpengaruh dengan pemikiran sekularisme.

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## Muhammad Syamir says

Ape yang saya gemar ttg penulisan syed naquib ialah ia seakan satu penceritaan daripada satu point ke satu point yang lain tidak terputus - putus diantaranya. Oleh kerana itu, ia membentuk satu gambaran yang besar dan mudah ttg pemikirannya secara am. Namun mudah juga utk terlepas beberapa point2 penting.

Mungkin kerana penguasaan bahasa beliau, maka sesetengah interpretasi dan pandangan beliau merupakan dari sudut bahasa. Seperti perbezaan secular, secularism and secularization, termasuk juga ttg beberapa konsep2 dalam islam dan penerangan kepada beberapa potongan ayat2 quran.

Perbincangan contentnya pula lebih kepada perkara2 yang asas ttg secularism seperti disenchantment of nature, desacralization of politics, dan disecretization of values dan bukanlah ttg hal2 yang bercabang seperti perincian satu persatu pemikiran2 yang lahir dari secularism. Namun begitu, ia merupakan satu pendedahan penting dan baik bgi saya.

Bagi saya tema utama yang sering diulang adalah the problem of knowledge. Termasuklah didalamnya.. Perbezaan besar dalam Worldviewnya, manusia sebagai penerima knowledge, kesan2nya dan juga cadangan2 solusi kepada permasalahan.

Oleh sebab itu, utk berbahas konsep secular as a political model (not as an ideology) dengan buku ini adalah tidak memadai kerana buku ini tidak membahaskan perihal tersebut malainkan hal2 yang asas.

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## Shafiq Razak Rajan says

Islam and Secularism is an antidote to the increasingly secularized world. The author highlights the permanence of Islam against the impermanent nature of Western civilization. He also points out that the decline of Muslim civilization is not due to its internal structure (like the Western civilization) but due to the loss of adab among Muslims. Loss of adab means the loss of respect for the hierarchy of things (ilmu, man's

place on Earth etc) as ordained by Allah. He also declares that to solve the issues of the Ummah is to dewesternize and Islamize knowledge through the establishment of Islamic universities.

With all due respect to Prof Al-Attas, I believe that book will be more complete if he outlines the steps to be done to islamize not only university, but also the conception of knowledge among the masses. Islam is not born out of university, but it is through the hardwork of the Prophet pbuh and his companions that they manage to Islamize the Arab Jahiliyyah society from the bottom up level. I'm not sure whether the International Islamic University of Malaysia fits Prof Al-Attas's conception of the ideal Islamic university, but the existence of IIUM does not solve the moral and political crises faced by Malaysian Muslims, let alone the rest of the ummah. We need scholars, true, but we also need agents of change among the Muslim masses, with the guidance of specialized scholars.

But this does not diminish the book's greatness. Prof Al-Attas has contributed for the rebuilding of the ummah, with special emphasis on the dewesternization of knowledge. Now, what is your contribution, O Muslim youths?

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### **Lutfi Ishak says**

Buku ini, sebagai salah satu karya agung dalam seratus tahun belakangan, mesti dihadap dan dibaca dari kulit ke kulit oleh semua Muslim, terutamanya golongan muda. Sebelum menghadam Prologomena, elok buku ini dihadap dahulu. Nikmati saja setiap frasa, ayat dan wacana. Di sana, keindahan fikiran dijalin dengan bahasa yang indah dan kemas. Saya sering kembali ke buku ini, dan setiap kali kembali, pasti ada sesuatu yang baru akan tersibak.

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### **Istikomah says**

religion,knowledge and education

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### **Umar says**

Excellent read. Starts out strong, continues strong until about halfway then it kinda petters off. Great points on the criticism of secularism in the middle and Christianity in the beginning. Great etymological discussion of adab and madina. The graphs were kind odd and I wonder if al-Attas likes to play darts because of that. The end on Islam in the Malay archipelago was fascinating in examining a culture and its amicability and history with Islam. I wish something similar could be applied to other cultures.

All in all, very wordy and verbose, very stuffy language that I think is sometimes helpful, sometimes not. Worth a read.

He has a few great quotes I will try put up later.

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## Ola Almasri says

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## Taranimu Qalb says

The aim of this book is to highlight the effect of secularism on Islam particularly its repercussions that beset Muslims nowadays. The author began in giving emphasis on the religion Christianity.

From the book itself, I have learned that secularism stemmed from the nature of Christianity. It is imperative to point out that christianity is a mixture of conflicting concepts. History tells us that Christian doctrines or beliefs are from gospel which is taken from the original message of Prophet Jesus. It was Paul who departed from original revelation then later set his own version, who began to preach his own version which later on becomes the religion Christianity.

I said Christianity is a mixture of conflicting concepts because of assimilation and amalgamation of Roman influence particularly Roman laws and Greek philosophy which is Aristotelian Philosophy. The latter was transformed from the symbolic interpretation of nature to become more concerned with explaining nature in plain naturalistic and purely rational terms reducing its origin and reality to natural causes and forces. From this world view, divine intervention to interpret nature is definitely out of context which means that there is no presence of God's role.

The proliferation of secularism began in the westernization of Christianity. It is the result of misapplication of Greek Philosophy in western theology and metaphysics which in 17th century logically led to the scientific revolution enunciated by Descartes, who opened the doors to DOUBT and SKEPTICISM, to utilitarianism, dialectical materialism, EVOLUTIONISM and historicism. From this, there began doubts on the existence of Supreme Being and that accept the idea of evolutionary or development which means that man is evolutionary and so his ideas. Those ideas will serve the needs of man and those ideas of man are according to his own purely rational thinking without reference to spiritual significance. Here comes that notion of 'becoming' versus 'being' which Islam rejects the first notion because man is being in which he was sent to earth by God with absolute set of values and purpose.

We now proceed to the confrontation of Islam and western civilization. The advent of Islam challenged Christianity. Islam claimed as true religion. It realized the true universal religion as it addressed the whole mankind and forged a firm bond of brotherhood among members if multiracial community. The western counter-attack emerged at the age of scientific revolution in the 13th century. The weakening of the Muslim world which was caused primarily by internal elements signaled as a boon for the western world. In the 17th century, the west began to colonize the Muslim world; western world view has proliferated through its educational system which ultimately brought the deislamization of the Muslim mind.

The basic internal problem that brought about by western educational system is the loss of ADAB. This refers to the loss of discipline of body, mind, and soul; the discipline that assures the recognition and acknowledgement of one's proper place in relation to one's self, society and community; the recognition and

acknowledgement of one's proper place to one's physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacities and potentials; the recognition and acknowledgement of the fact that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchy.

To cut this short, this is the main goal of this book that is to address the fundamental problems that beset Muslim mind which primarily caused by the infiltration of western educational system. And of course the solution is to Islamize the foreign concepts that are alien to Islam. I am not going to emphasize it but according to the author, our main task will be first to isolate the elements including the key concepts which make up the culture and civilization. After isolation of the key concepts, then infuse Islamic elements and key concepts which, in view of their fundamental nature as defining the fitrah, in fact imbue the knowledge with the quality of its natural function and purpose and thus makes it true knowledge. Our next important task will be the formulation and integration of the essential Islamic elements and key concepts as to produce a composition which will comprise the core knowledge to be deployed in our educational system from the lower to the higher levels in respective gradations designed to conform to the standard of each level.

In my own opinion, the author focuses on the loss of adab as the effect of the western world view then Islamize the knowledge is the solution to this Muslim dilemma. However, he never touched the Islamization of one's self that is to purify the heart which I think is one of the most crucial in combating our internal problems.

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## **Sarip Dol says**

Will re-read soon.

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## **Amira Abdullah says**

Islam and secularism. The title direct me to think that this book must be about politics. Ternyata aku salah. Politic have little to do with self development as it is to social development. In this modern (or post modern?) world, unlimited access to information buat kita keliru, as to what is the root of knowledge.

Apa kaitannya dengan secularism? Persoalan kepada asas confusion tadi was due to the secularization of knowledge by the West yang akhirnya tiada link between knowledge dengan Man (inner self) in pertaining to development, progress and goal in this world as a preparation for the next world.

Syed Naquib did a good job in explaining the root of knowledge and addressing the issue of secularism of knowledge and how it affected muslims today.

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## **Ari says**

Al Attas with his non-structural style of writing takes his readers to an enlightening mind opener of the presence of secularism in the world and its threat to Islam. Al Attas described secularism in three aspects: 1. disenchantment of nature, 2. desacralization of politics, 3. deconsecration of values (giving temporary meanings to objects)

Secularism is the final goal of secularization. The latter is described as the process, while secularism can also be regarded as an idealism. Islam opposes secularism since nature is a "Created Book" and has become signs or symbols of the transcendental presence of God. Nature, therefore, can never be disenchanted. The disenchantment of nature in Islam only pertains to the banishing of any mythological aspects that are ungodly (legends, etc).Islam also rejects the idea of postmodernist since there would never be a constant deconstruction in Islam such as proposed by Derrida. This is because every object has a permanent meaning or value that are inherent as they were created for purposes by God.

It is the loss of "adab" that is caused by confusions and lack of knowledge that let secularization enter Islam. This can be hindered by education.

Great thoughts for a small book!!

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## **Ahmad Max says**

Karya agung dari tokoh agung. Kalau nak tahu asas ISTAC (yg sudah dibunuh juak-juak pelampau itu), buku

ini adalah cetak-birunya. Kalau ingin mula berjinak-jinak dengan karya teras SN Al-Attas, buku ini pemulaannya.

Sejarah dan perbezaan nilai Islam dan sekular (dan nilai Barat secara umumnya), asas dan konsep pendidikan dalam neraca Islam (ta'dib), kemelut Muslim sebelum dan selepas era kolonial (pembaratan) dan jalan penyelesaian terhadap dilemma Muslim masakini (dewesternisation of knowledge).

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### **Fadillah says**

His writing is brilliant, concise and detailed. I may not agree with some of his ideas but i understand why he thought so. This book offered great explanation on the concept of secularism but highly critical towards Western values and the so called modernist muslim scholars. You can even find page on how Malaysia and Indonesia are unfortunately classified as no 'adab' due to the enforcement of secularism during colonial period and the system remains until now. The judgement tone is so obvious while i read that. However, it still consider as a good book at least for me though I don't see eye to eye with some of his points.

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### **Alfisyahrin says**

Pembahasan mendasar yang mungkin akan merekonstruksi struktur berpikir kita yang selama ini seringkali terdistorsi oleh nilai-nilai selain Islam. Karena Islam memang lebih dari 'sekadar' keyakinan, tetapi juga pandangan alam (worldview). Pembahasan Al-Attas tentang konsep-konsep kunci seperti Din (Agama), Manusia, Ilmu, dan Pendidikan mungkin akan membuat anda memandang dunia dengan cara yang berbeda.

Buku ini adalah salah satu titik tolak dari proyek besar Islamisasi Ilmu Pengetahuan. Sebuah proyek yang juga tidak luput dari pro-kontra. Meskipun begitu, ada sebuah pesan penting dari buku dan proyek ini yang saya kira disepakati oleh semua orang: kaum muslim harus menguasai ilmu pengetahuan untuk bangkit kembali.

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